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Li Fu and the Lu-Wang school under the Ch'ing

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Introduction

This study will explain the general intellectual climate of the early Ch'ing period and explore the political and cultural characteristics of the Ch'ing regime at the time. To achieve these ends I have focused on the Lu-Wang school, but will pay special attention to Li Fu (1675–1750), the most outstanding representative of this school in the early Ch'ing. By the early Ch'ing, the Lu-Wang doctrines had undergone several transformations. Li Fu's thought can be seen as the final Lu-Wang response to the Ch'eng-Chu school. Early Ch'ing rulers and scholars generally blamed the left wing of the Wang Yang-ming school for the fall of the Ming dynasty. Yet Li Fu demonstrated successfully that a Lu-Wang scholar could still lead a viable intellectual life even after the Ming. In other words, the Lu-Wang school did not end with the fall of the Ming.

Stressing the transformative power that the mind has upon moral cultivation, the Lu-Wang scholar takes a critical stance toward book learning (*tu-shu*), even if he does not necessarily exclude it from the process of moral perfection. One among many distinctions between the Lu-Wang school and its rival, the Ch'eng-Chu school, resides in their differing attitudes toward the role book learning plays in their moral programs. For the Ch'eng-Chu school, book learning has an inherent positive value in the course of moral cultivation.

Notwithstanding these differences, by the Ch'ing period neither Lu-Wang scholars nor those of the Ch'eng-chu school hesitated to employ an evidential approach (*k'ao-cheng*) as an efficient way to argue for their own doctrines. Prior to this, the battles between them were conducted primarily in the sphere of philosophical speculation. What compelled the Lu-Wang scholars to assume this new weapon – (that is) the evidential approach – may have resided in the shift in intellectual climate from "honoring the moral nature" (*tsun te-hsing*) to "the pursuits of inquiry

and study" (*tao wen-hsüeh*). Briefly, the philological turn did occur during the late Ming and early Ch'ing periods.

In reconstructing the philosophical argument between Lu Hsiang-shan (1139–92) and Chu Hsi (1130–1200), it becomes apparent that the vital issue separating them is the different approach each takes to the ontological presupposition of "mind" (*hsin*). From this perspective, the other differences, such as whether book learning benefits moral cultivation, merely stem from their ontological presupposition of mind.

Various political and intellectual factors contributed to the rise of the Chu Hsi school and the decline of the Lu Hsiang-shan school. The pressures that the Chu Hsi school exercised upon the Lu Hsiang-shan school were manifold. First of all, intellectually, during his lifetime the doctrines set forth by Chu Hsi and the commentaries on the classics made by him attracted an enormous following; the degree to which these beliefs found acceptance and support is reflected by the ease with which they survived the political purges aimed at their obliteration. In contrast, the philosophy of Lu Hsiang-shan lost influence shortly after his death. The intellectual reasons for the rise and fall of these two schools are discernible if we penetrate their doctrines.

Furthermore, since the end of the Southern Sung period, Chu Hsi's scholarship had gained government patronage and become the official learning. In the Yüan dynasty, Chu Hsi's annotations to the classics were further employed to test the civil service candidates. The line between a student sincere in his devotion to Chu Hsi's philosophy and examination candidates keen on government position blurred, because knowledge of Chu Hsi's doctrine became a *conditio sine qua non* for passing the civil service examinations. Because of this, K'ung Shang-jen (1648–1718) lamented that most of the students favored Chu Hsi and attacked Lu Hsiang-shan simply because the former wrote commentaries that could be used for the civil service examinations.[1]

This trend certainly could not satisfy scholars committed to learning for the sake of intellectual and moral enlightenment. Wang Yang-ming (1472–1529) is perhaps the best example of such philosophers. He reacted against the current of Chu Hsi's learning in two ways. First, through a process of intellectual struggle with Chu Hsi's doctrines, he eventually arrived at a theory of moral action that drew directly upon the inner mind as the source of morality, in opposition to Chu Hsi's philosophy. Second, in order to reduce his own psychological anxieties caused both by his felt intellectual indebtedness to Chu Hsi's doctrine and by the hostility of the Chu Hsi scholars toward his newly proposed theory,

1. K'ung Shang-jen, *Hu-hai chi*, Shanghai, 1957, 9/203–204.

Wang Yang-ming restored *The Great Learning of the Ancient Text* as a justification of his theory of *ko-wu* (rectification of the mind). Furthermore, he compiled *Chu Hsi's Final Conclusion Arrived at Late in Life* to try to show that no basic difference existed between his own doctrines and those articulated by Chu Hsi. Both of Yang-ming's works triggered a series of debates that continued well into the Ch'ing period.

The content of these debates no doubt had bearing upon the philosophical stands of both the Ch'eng-Chu and the Lu-Wang schools; the form of these debates witnessed the rise of the evidential approach itself.[2] Li Fu, as a Lu-Wang scholar in the Ch'ing period, not only argued with the Chu Hsi scholars on philosophical issues, but also assumed the new weapon of evidential research to fight against the Chu Hsi school.

Although we can detect an underlying intellectual continuity between the thought of the Sung Confucians and the early Ch'ing Confucians, their political ideology underwent a subtle but fundamental change. Before the reign of the K'ang-hsi emperor, in spite of their intellectual differences, both the Ch'eng-Chu school and the Lu-Wang school shared the assumption that the Way (*tao*) or the tradition of the Way (*tao-t'ung*) could be employed to criticize the political authorities, the rulers. This critical dimension of the Way, however, eventually was eliminated in the thought of Ch'ing scholars (except among the Ming loyalists).

Li Fu, who was the major champion of the Lu-Wang school during the early Ch'ing, is a good example of a scholar who reflected the intellectual and political changes that occurred in that period. An in-depth analysis of his life and thought will help to illuminate how the political establishment successfully usurped the formerly independent tradition of the Way. Moreover, Li Fu illustrates how a man who claimed to be an adherent of the Lu-Wang school could still serve as a scholar-official under an alien dynasty. Finally, his thought illustrates the process whereby the debates between the Ch'eng-Chu school and the Lu-Wang school resulted in the evidential research movement. I also will discuss the Ch'eng-Chu school, the rival of the Lu-Wang school, at some length when clarity warrants a broader perspective for the Lu-Wang school.

2. This thesis was first proposed by Professor Ying-shih Yü; see his *Li-shih yü ssu-hsiang* (History and thought), Taipei, 1977, pp. 87–156.